

SENATE COMMITTEE ON COMMERCE, SCIENCE, AND TRANSPORTATION

HEARING ON INTERGOVERNMENTAL PANEL ON CLIMATE CHANGE (IPCC) THIRD ASSESSMENT REPORT

TUESDAY, MAY 1, 2001

TESTIMONY OF SENATOR LARRY E. CRAIG

Mr. Chairman, thank you for inviting me to testify. The potential of global climate change is a serious issue. The stakes are high.

Premature government action to cut back energy use to levels lower than those in the growth-oriented nineties could cool the economy faster than it cools the climate. On the other hand, ignoring the concerns expressed by some respected scientists about recent warming trends is equally irresponsible.

During the last two years, Mr. Chairman, I have sought the counsel of many scientists on this fascinating subject. Clearly, the scientific community has made impressive gains in its understanding of the global climate system. But with increased understanding has come increased uncertainty about the relative roles of greenhouse gases, aerosols, land cover changes, and ocean currents in the last century's temperature changes.

In my opinion, Mr. Chairman, moving ahead with strict government action based on our current "best guess" of what we think is happening is unwise. This is especially true in light of the potential economic and national security impacts that are likely as a consequence of restricting our nation's energy use.

What is needed at this time, Mr. Chairman, is steady and thoughtful leadership. National policy on this issue must evolve commensurately with the increasing confidence we achieve in our scientific understanding. Consensus on appropriate government action should be the cornerstone of our national policy on this issue.

The National Academy of Sciences, upon the authority of the charter granted to it by the Congress in 1863, has a mandate that requires it to advise our government on scientific and technical matters. The creation of the United Nations' Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) does not – indeed, should not – extinguish the mandate of the National Academy “to advise” our government on “scientific and technical matters.”

Let me make clear, Mr. Chairman, that I am not here today to impugn the work of the scientists associated with the IPCC's Third Assessment. Frankly, after conferring with many scientists credentialed in the disciplines of atmospheric and ocean sciences, I'm quite confident that much of the underlying work contained in that Assessment is relatively sound.

However, these same scientists who I conferred with caution that the conclusions contained in the Assessment's summary, much of which has been reported in the media, are by no means certain, and, at the very least, must be scrutinized.

In my opinion, Mr. Chairman, the National Academy should get that task – and here is why:

- the National Academy, through its operating arm, the National Research Council (NRC), has been reviewing the science of climate change for almost two decades;
- many of the scientists involved in NRC research on climate change have contributed scientific analysis to the IPCC's Third Assessment; and, finally,
- the NRC has prepared recent reports, themselves syntheses of many other studies, that are useful guides to the state of knowledge and the requirements for the scientific path forward.

Mr. Chairman, I have reviewed these recent scientific reports. The NRC's “*Pathways*” and “*Climate Modeling*” reports raise some profoundly important questions. Our best policy decisions could turn on the answers to any of them.

The *Pathways* report stated that presently available observational and

modeling information on climate change is useful but cannot provide the knowledge needed to make informed decisions on many crucial issues.

The most recent NRC report, “*The Science of Regional and Global Change – Putting Knowledge to Work*” which was distributed to every member of the Senate by me and Senators Hagel and Murkowski in early March, reaffirms the findings in the *Pathways* report.

In addition, this new report highlights a concern shared by many in Congress – the increasing use of science as an advocacy tool for political agendas.

Mr. Chairman, the National Academy recognizes the legitimacy of that concern by making the following statement on page 10 of that report:

“Research on how to do more effective, credible, and helpful scientific assessments is badly needed. Of particular importance will be the development of assessment processes that link knowledge producers and users in a dialogue that builds a mutual understanding of what is needed, what can credibly be said, and how it can be said in a way that maintains both scientific credibility and political legitimacy.” (Emphasis added.)

The National Academy proposes solid recommendations for implementing an effective research agenda and I strongly endorse them.

Mr. Chairman, in addition to these reports, the National Academy will soon invite members of the Senate to attend a high level, half day, forum to be held at its national headquarters here in Washington, D.C.

The forum will be led by a balanced panel of our nation’s most distinguished climate scientists who will discuss with attending Senators the state of the science, and lead us in a search for scientific common ground on which solid policy can be based.

I urge all the members of this Committee to attend this event where we can discuss these issues in a spirit of bipartisanship with our national scientific experts.

Mr. Chairman, I know that you agree that we owe our constituents, indeed,

all the citizens of our nation, a genuine effort to achieve a consensus based solution to the climate change issue. The National Academy can help us accomplish this task.

In closing, let me reemphasize the need for the National Academy to be allowed to fulfill its mandate to advise us and the Administration on the scientific and technical issues of climate change.

Mr. Chairman, and with all due respect to the many international experts associated with the IPCC, when it comes to accepting scientific conclusions on matters of such overwhelming impact on our global competitiveness and national security, my faith is with our National Academy scientists to ensure a balanced and objective analysis of the scientific facts.

I hope you and other members of this Committee will join me, Senator Hagel and other interested Senators at the National Academy forum sometime next month to further discuss, and attempt to understand, these very complex and important issues.

Thank you.